

Canadian educational institutions must do more to address climate change: Sustainability and Education Policy Network releases new research identifying leaders and laggards on sustainability issues.

SASKATOON: December 1, 2014: As international governmental discussions on climate change begin today at COP20 in Peru, only half of all Canadian 220 post-secondary institutions have any policies addressing sustainability issues. Similarly, only half of Canada's 389 K-12 school divisions have policies focusing on sustainability, with only 20 policies specifically addressing climate change.

"The challenges of climate change require an informed and motivated citizenry, and education has a key role to play in enabling Canadians to address this important issue of our times," states Dr. Marcia McKenzie, Principal Investigator for The Sustainability and Education Policy Network (SEPN), a national network of researchers and organizations advancing sustainability in education policy and practice.

There has been little study of how sustainability is being addressed in formal education across Canada, motivating SEPN to research sustainability and climate-related education policies in all 220 accredited post-secondary institutions, the 13 provincial and territorial ministries of education, and all 389 K-12 school divisions.

SEPN scored post-secondary institutions on their uptake of four high-level Sustainability Initiatives (SI): undertaking a sustainability assessment; signing a national or international environmental or sustainability declaration; having a sustainability office or officer; and having sustainability policies. When institutions were grouped and ranked according to provincial averages, Québec and British Columbia had the highest SI scores and the greatest number of sustainability leaders. Saskatchewan and the three territories had the lowest SI scores. (Research brief: http://sepn.ca/research_results/sustainability-canadian-post-secondary-institutions-leaders-laggards-live/)

SI scores based on provincial rankings of K-12 institutions gave school districts in Ontario and New Brunswick the highest SI scores and the three territories with the lowest. Of the 224 school division policies with a focus on sustainability, only 20 focused on climate change. (Research brief: http://sepn.ca/research_results/research-brief-sustainability-canadian-k-12-education/)

In an on-going study of a cross-Canada sample of 50 post-secondary institutions, 57% have sustainability-specific policies that address climate change. 44% have more detailed climate action policies or plans. Most of these policies focus on institutional greenhouse gas emissions and operations, versus also addressing how institutions will respond to climate change through academic curriculum, research, or community outreach.

"There has been a steady increase in uptake of sustainability across the formal education sector over the past decade. However our research suggests that there is more to be done to ensure that this goes beyond reducing institutional greenhouse gas emissions to consider broader implications," comments McKenzie, "A worst case scenario is the use of sustainability to 'greenwash' business as usual. A much better case scenario is education that mobilizes knowledge and solutions to enable change for a more sustainable future."

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Learning for a Sustainable Future
Sierra Youth Coalition

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Assembly of First Nations
Canadian Federation of Students
Global Youth Education Network
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